

Holiday Happenings

Lighting Up The Holidays For Children In The Hospital

(NAPSI)—The holidays may be the most wonderful time of the year, but the reality is, many children won't be able to enjoy time with family at home. Instead of shopping for gifts and trimming the tree, countless children will be in the hospital, fighting to get stronger. Missing family traditions. Missing holiday events. Missing waking up to see that Santa has visited.

However, thanks to dedicated doctors, nurses, child life specialists and more at pediatric hospitals across the country, there's still a bit of holiday magic to help brighten the days of patients and their families.

One Child's Journey

After two rounds of chemotherapy and more than 130 days in the hospital, there's a lot 12-year-old Meg doesn't like about the hospital. But there are also a lot of things that help make her fight easier.

Meg's journey began on vacation this past summer when her parents noticed bruises and red pin holes covering her legs. Concerned, they brought Meg to Children's National Hospital, the premier pediatric hospital in nearby Washington, D.C., where the doctors diagnosed her with Acute Myeloid Leukemia. After months of aggressive treatment, Meg will continue her care through the holidays this year.

"There were not words to describe the feeling when you learn you have cancer. You go from complete childhood freedom to living in a hospital room," says Meg. "After receiving my diagnosis, I started learning about my treatment and was crushed to learn I was probably going to be in the hospital for treatment through all my favorite holidays."

One of the most challenging parts of any hospital stay is finding ways for kids like Meg to still be kids. It's especially difficult during the holiday season when the last place they want to be is in a hospital bed. Pediatric hospitals establish programs such as art and music therapy, play time with therapy dogs, and access to video games and teen lounges that help make the hospital feel more like home. Unfortunately, these efforts aren't covered by insurance, and Children's National relies on the support of donors to fund programs like these that help treat the whole child and help them grow up stronger.



Meg (left) and Aniyah (right) are best friends with a lot in common, even cancer. Together, they have fun just being kids.

For Meg, art therapy is particularly impactful. Even on her roughest days of intense treatment, art reminds her of home. It gives her something to look forward to and a sense of self and the ability to express how she's feeling, while also providing opportunities to spend time with visiting friends. Art time is a way Meg can bond with her sister Ashlee, who visits often. Meg also enjoys playing soccer in the Healing Garden at Children's National, goofing around with therapy dogs and getting massages each Wednesday.

"It is hard to not have my freedom, but I could not imagine my stay here without having these types of programs. They allow me to focus on something else and not just sit in a room all day thinking about my diagnosis," says Meg.

Lighting Up the Holidays

To ensure children like Meg have what they need to grow up stronger and let brave children and their families know they're not fighting alone, Children's National Hospital Foundation recently launched its annual Light Up Dr. Bear holiday campaign. Every time someone makes a gift to Children's National, more than 300 light-up bears shine simultaneously in the hospital, at outpatient centers and at locations across the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region.

For more information about Children's National and how you can donate, visit www.ChildrensNational.org/Lights2.